

Letter of Support for SB91-

The basic purpose of SB 91 is to clarify the Montana statutes regarding the incorporation of a community as an independent, self-governing municipality. Specifically, the requirement that such a community have a "post office" in order to petition for incorporation is vague, archaic and, basically, impossible to achieve. When the statute was written, the U.S. Postal Service was a federal agency but in 1971 it became an independent agency with the sole stated function to "deliver mail as efficiently as possible". Community development is, clearly, not one of its functions.

Lockwood is a Montana community striving to become responsible for its own affairs. While incorporating into a full-fledged city may be several years away and, ultimately, not precisely what eventually develops, significant and glaring issues are emerging that are not being adequately addressed by the current government structure. It is quite apparent that a fair, efficient and effective system of local government be established that has both the responsibility and authority to represent the community and to serve its needs.

The option for the voters of Lockwood to eventually choose to become incorporated would be enabled by passage of SB91.

According to a recent estimate by the Yellowstone County GIS Office based on the 2010 census, there is a population of 8,437 within the boundaries serviced by the Lockwood School and Lockwood Fire Districts. If it was incorporated, then, it would be the 11th largest community in Montana-which, if there was a high school in Lockwood, would be class "A". Also within that geographical area with smaller boundaries are the Lockwood Water/Sewer District, the Lockwood Transportation District and the Lockwood Irrigation District. All other municipal services such as law enforcement and street/road maintenance are nominally provided by Yellowstone County.

The people who live in Lockwood reside in a wide variety of homes. There are many homes on acreages with horses and other livestock. There are several nice suburban middle-class neighborhoods with single-family houses. There are very few multi-unit apartments. Mobile homes are, by far, the most common type of housing, though. These manufactured homes constitute an estimated 50% of the residences in Lockwood. While some are very nice and in pleasant surroundings, most are in crowded mobile home parks with several being in deteriorated condition.

The plain truth is that there are a great many people with limited incomes living within our community. 47% of the almost 1200 K-8 students in our school qualify for free or reduced lunches. There are also a great many senior citizens living on fixed incomes.

Many "blue collar" workers live in our community and there are also many professional and "white collar" workers as well. While there is an incredible demographic diversity, there is a high degree of cohesion, acceptance and community pride amongst those of us who choose to live in Lockwood.

Many businesses have also chosen to make Lockwood their "home". Our community contains a vast array of industrial, commercial and heavy-duty transportation enterprises. It is important to note that the long-term success of our community depends on the success of its businesses. There are many fundamental inter-dependencies that must be acknowledged, fostered and optimized for the mutual benefit of both the people who live here and the people who work and do business here.

Any effort, then, to develop a strong local government must certainly include the business community.

It is quite apparent to those who live in Lockwood that there are a great many things needing urgent attention. Particularly-now that our sewer is being installed-is the need for considerable improvements to our transportation infrastructure. Many major thoroughfares were originally country dirt roads that have simply been paved over. Now, the families who drive, bike and walk on them, share the same narrow roads without sidewalks with heavy semi-truck traffic. Lack of coordinated and well-thought-out planning in the past has resulted in an intolerable situation today.

The people of Lockwood wish to be enabled to deal with such issues ourselves.

In 2007 the City of Billings commissioned a detailed study to be done that explored the advisability of annexing Lockwood. After their analysis, the City Council determined that bringing Lockwood into compliance with city codes would cost more than \$84 million. They voted unanimously against annexing our community. Actually, this is widely regarded by Lockwood people as being satisfactory since few who live here wish to be part of Billings. We would rather take care of our own issues.

Respectfully submitted, Jan. 17, 2011

Don Reed, Chairman
Lockwood Steering Committee